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SUBJECT: VICE ADMIRAL MOELLER'S DECEMBER 18-19 VISIT
HIGHLIGHTS AFRICOM ROLE IN REGION

Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: In a successful visit December 18-19, AFRICOM Deputy to the Commander for Military Operations (DCMO) Vice Admiral Michael T. Moeller attended the activation of the first companies of the new Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) formed since the AFL was disbanded and restructured two years ago. While the activation ceremony was the primary reason for VADM Moeller's trip, the DCMO used the opportunity of the visit to brief President Sirleaf, MOD Brownie Samukai, a group of key legislators, and influential members of civil society on the progress on the stand-up of AFRICOM. With just a few exceptions, all the Liberians were open to engagement with AFRICOM, and favored an AFRICOM presence in Liberia, although there was still some confusion of the role of AFRICOM despite a concerted effort by the mission to explain AFRICOM. End Summary.

12. (U) Vice Admiral Moeller was invited to inspect the troops and speak at the activation ceremony December 19 of the first three companies of the new AFL (Alpha, Bravo and Charlie Companies of the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Brigade). The companies, formed from the first 390 troops trained by American contractors using Title 22 PKO funds, will become fully operational by the end of 2008. The DCMO also inspected EBK military barracks, which is the AFL's operational base.

13. (C) VADM Moeller briefed President Sirleaf and MOD Samukai on the status of AFRICOM. Both officials repeated the GOL's invitation to host the AFRICOM command or any element of it, but neither pressed the matter. VADM Moeller responded that the question of the shape of AFRICOM presence is still to be determined. President Sirleaf assured the DCMO that Liberia would continue to consult closely with AFRICOM "irrespective of the decision."

14. (SBU) The DCMO used the opportunity of a dinner hosted by the Ambassador with key Liberians from the press, academia, business, Muslim and Christian religious groups and women's organizations to dispel common misconceptions and unfounded concerns about AFRICOM's intentions, including building permanent bases in Africa and the consequences of a country's cooperation or lack of cooperation with AFRICOM. The dinner conversation then turned to internal Liberian issues including the fragility of the state, and the role of a free press. There was a general consensus among the Liberians that corruption was endemic to Liberian life and posed the most immediate threat to stability.

15. (C) In a lively conversation at a luncheon with nine key members of the legislature, VADM Moeller made clear the distinction between the activation of a new command, which is basically a decision made solely by the United States, and how the new command will engage with countries within its area of responsibility, which is a decision that must be

decided between the United States and its partners. All but one legislator (opposition Senator Cletus Wotorson) were positive toward strengthened Liberian engagement with AFRICOM, and welcomed a presence in Liberia. Several of the legislators, however, raised the concern that an AFRICOM presence may attract terrorist activity in Liberia, something unknown in Liberia today. Others pointed out there is already a large U.S. presence in the country, so the potential threat already exists.

¶6. (C) Comment: Vice Admiral Moeller's visit achieved its twin objectives of highlighting the activation of the AFL companies, a significant event in Liberia's effort to take over its own security, and maintaining a high-level contact with Liberia's decision-makers on AFRICOM. The question of terrorism was high on the Liberians' minds. However, many understood the risks, and President Sirleaf said she hoped that soon "terrorism will be on the decline" with renewed diplomatic efforts to reduce the causes of terrorism.
Booth